



Info ConsortiumNews <info@consortiumnews.com>

Press inquiry: NewsGuard review of ConsortiumNews.com

34 messages

Zachary Fishman <zack.fishman@newsguardtech.com>
To: info@consortiumnews.com

Fri, Mar 25, 2022 at 11:19 AM

Hello,

I'm Zack Fishman, and I'm a reporter with [NewsGuard](#), a service that reviews news and information websites for credibility and transparency. These reviews, which include a written summary and a checklist of [nine criteria](#), are intended to help readers have more context for the news they read online.

I'm currently working on a review of ConsortiumNews.com, and I'm hoping to talk with someone who could answer a few questions about its structure and editorial processes — including its ownership, its handling of corrections, and its publication of false content. Is there someone I can talk with over the phone or email to get a comment on these issues?

As a heads up, we incorporate quotes from our correspondences into our published reviews, so this conversation should be considered on the record.

Thank you,

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Zack Fishman
Staff Analyst
[NewsGuard Technologies](#)
zack.fishman@newsguardtech.com

Info ConsortiumNews <info@consortiumnews.com>
To: Zachary Fishman <zack.fishman@newsguardtech.com>

Mon, Mar 28, 2022 at 9:26 AM

Mr. Zachary Fishman,
Consortium News was founded in 1995 by Robert Parry, the premier investigative reporter of his day, who broke the biggest Iran-Contra stories for the Associated Press, such as the role of Oliver North. I was a correspondent for The Wall Street Journal, The Boston Globe, The Sunday Times of London and many other mainstream newspapers and began my professional career at The New York Times in 1975.

Our deputy editor is a former WSJ and Dow Jones editor, our India correspondent reported for The New York Times, one of our columnists is the former Asia editor of The International Herald Tribune who has written for The New Yorker, and another columnist is a former C.I.A. officer who led the arrest of terrorism suspect Abu Zubaydah. Until his death last year, on our board was a former United States senator.

We come out of the establishment and reserve our right as journalists to criticize our own government's policies. One may not agree with our point of view but would surely agree we have a right to it.

Consortium News does not have an owner, but its publisher is the Consortium for Independent Journalism set up by Bob Parry, which is clearly printed on the front page of the website. We have absolutely no connections whatsoever to any government or corporation like NewsGuard does, according to your partners displayed on your site. In our 27-years of existence we have never taken a penny in advertising or any contribution from a corporation or government. We are funded solely by our readers and two U.S.-based foundations. It would be up to the foundations whether we can reveal their identities. We run three fundraising campaigns a year with our target and the amount of contributions displayed prominently on our front page.

As a former United Nations-based correspondent for a quarter of a century, I conducted thousands of media interviews, including with presidents, prime ministers and foreign ministers. In my other reporting I have interviewed countless individuals in other positions. It is a steadfast rule that the person being interviewed sets the ground rules of whether it is on or off the record, on background or not for use. I have never known of a reporter setting those rules upfront, nor in nearly 50 years of experience have I known of a reporter asking for an interview by stating at the outset that the interview subject is guilty of wrongdoing of any kind and not merely suspected of it. That kind of assertion is always reserved until after the subject is questioned.

We ask that you kindly inform us of what you deem to be "false content."

This email is on the record and can be published.

Sincerely,

Joe Lauria
Editor-in-Chief
Consortium News

[Quoted text hidden]

Zachary Fishman <zack.fishman@newsguardtech.com>
To: Info ConsortiumNews <info@consortiumnews.com>

Mon, Mar 28, 2022 at 6:14 PM

Dear Joe,

Thank you for this detailed background on Consortium News, which has already answered a couple of my questions. I do apologize that the wording of my email insinuated that I had come to a predetermined conclusion on whether your website has published false content, when I have not — be sure that I am interested in your responses to my questions, which I will list below:

1. Why are the names of the two foundations that have given to Consortium News not disclosed on your website?
2. Although Consortium News articles do name their authors, they do not typically provide any biographical or contact information for the authors, nor do author pages. Is this information available on the site somewhere I may have missed? If not, do you have a comment on why this information is not provided?
3. Does Consortium News have a corrections policy, and if so, what is it?
4. I found one recent correction made by Consortium News, made in the articles' comment sections of "[On a Knife's Edge in Ukraine](#)". (I also found that Consortium News corrected one of its own comments on "[RUSSIAGATE: Luke Harding's Hard Sell](#)".) Are there any other examples of recent corrections issued on the site that I may have missed?

I also found some instances where Consortium News appeared to publish false or misleading claims, and I'd like to get your comments on them. I've listed some examples and provided brief explanations on why they seem to be false:

6. The March 2022 article "[A Proposed Solution to the Ukraine War](#)" stated: "The government of Ukraine has denied human rights and political self-determination to the peoples of the Donbass. Some 13,000 people have died during the eight years since the 2014 coup, according to the United Nations. **The Ukrainian government has overtly genocidal policies toward Russian minorities.**"

The International Criminal Court, the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) have all said they have found no evidence of a genocide in Donbas. For example, [A 2016 report](#) by the International Criminal Court found that the acts of violence allegedly committed by the Ukrainian authorities in 2013 and 2014 could constitute an "attack directed against a civilian population," but it also said that "the information available did not provide a reasonable basis to believe that the attack was systematic or widespread." And the U.S. Mission to OSCE stated in a [February 2022 Twitter post](#), "The SMM [Special Monitoring Mission] has complete access to the government controlled areas of Ukraine and HAS NEVER reported anything remotely resembling Russia's claims [of genocide in Ukraine]."

7. The February 2022 article "[Ukraine: Guides to Reflection](#)," asserted, "Hence, the inflation of Russian behavior in Ukraine (**where Washington organized a coup against a democratically elected government** because we disliked its political complexion) and Syria (where Russia's intervention is at the request of the established government while the U.S. commitment to occupying parts of it has no legal basis)."

The U.S. supported the Maidan revolution that ousted then-Ukraine President Viktor Yanukovich in 2014 — including a December 2013 visit by John McCain to Kyiv in support of protesters — but there is no evidence that the U.S. "organized" a "coup." Instead, it has the markings of a popular uprising, precipitated by widely covered protests against Yanukovich's decision to suspend preparations for the signing of an association and free-trade agreement with the European Union.

8. The March 2022 article "[PATRICK LAWRENCE: Imperial Infantilism](#)" stated: "Now the names we have for Putin roll around among like pinballs. 'Hitler' has fallen somewhat out of fashion, the hyperbole having proven too silly, or maybe because NATO is now arming a **Nazi-infested regime**," which was a reference to the Ukrainian government.

But there isn't evidence that Nazism has a substantial influence in Ukraine. Radical far-right groups in Ukraine do represent a "threat to the democratic development of Ukraine," according to a [2018 Freedom House report](#). But it also stated that far-right extremists have poor political representation in Ukraine and no plausible path to power — for example, in the [2019 parliamentary elections](#), the far-right nationalist party Svoboda won 2.2 percent of the vote, while the Svoboda candidate, Ruslan Koshulynskyy, won just 1.6 percent of the vote in the presidential election.

9. The February 2022 article "[John Pilger: War in Europe & the Rise of Raw Propaganda](#)" stated: "Vladimir Putin refers to the '**genocide**' in the eastern Donbass region of Ukraine. Following **the coup in Ukraine in 2014 – orchestrated by former U.S. President Barack Obama's 'point person' in Kyiev, Victoria Nuland** – the coup regime, **infested with neo-Nazis**, launched a campaign of terror against Russian-speaking Donbass, which accounts for a third of Ukraine's population."

This article makes the claims similar to the ones highlighted in the previous three articles, and are seemingly false for the same reasons.

10. The March 2022 article "[Caitlin Johnstone: International Law Becomes Meaningless When Applied Only to US Enemies](#)" claimed, "The OPCW is now subject to the dictates of the U.S. government, as evidenced by **the organisation's coverup of a 2018 false flag incident in Syria** which resulted in airstrikes by the U.S., UK and France during Bolton's tenure as a senior Trump advisor."

The article is referring to the 2018 bombing of the Syrian city of Douma. Both the Violations Documentation Center (VDC), a nonprofit that records alleged violations of international law in Syria and reports to the United Nations Security Council, and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which oversees the Chemical Weapons Convention, reported that the city was chemically bombed, with the VDC blaming the attack on Syrian troops loyal to President Bashar al-Assad.

There is no evidence that this was a "false flag incident," or that the OPCW was deliberately covering up such an incident, let alone that such a cover-up was dictated by the U.S. government. Johnstone's article linked to a Nation article discussing leaked documents from a member of the OPCW's fact-finding mission for the Douma attack, but the documents do not provide evidence that the OPCW intended to cover up a chemical attack purposely done by another party to blame it the Syrian government (a false flag). Instead, the documents were presented to contradict the OPCW's conclusion that a chemical attack occurred at all, and the leaker alleged in a leaked email that the organization came to

the wrong conclusion by misrepresenting facts and allowing bias to seep in — a deliberate cover-up was not among his accusations. (There also appear to be compelling reasons to question the veracity of the leaker's claims.)

11. Finally, do you plan to run corrections on any of the above examples?

Thank you for your openness to my questions, and I look forward to your responses.

Best,
Zack

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Info ConsortiumNews <info@consortiumnews.com>
To: Zachary Fishman <zack.fishman@newsguardtech.com>

Fri, Apr 1, 2022 at 2:01 PM

Hi Zachary,
I will be working on these questions over the weekend. Thanks for your patience.

Best,
Joe

[Quoted text hidden]

Zachary Fishman <zack.fishman@newsguardtech.com>
To: Info ConsortiumNews <info@consortiumnews.com>

Fri, Apr 1, 2022 at 2:08 PM

Thanks for letting me know — I know I provided a sizable list of questions and appreciate in advance your time in answering them.

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Info ConsortiumNews <info@consortiumnews.com>
To: Zachary Fishman <zack.fishman@newsguardtech.com>

Wed, Apr 6, 2022 at 3:51 PM

Hi Zach,
I've gathered the evidence for my reply to your questions. I must now confer with our board. I will get back to you.

Best,
Joe

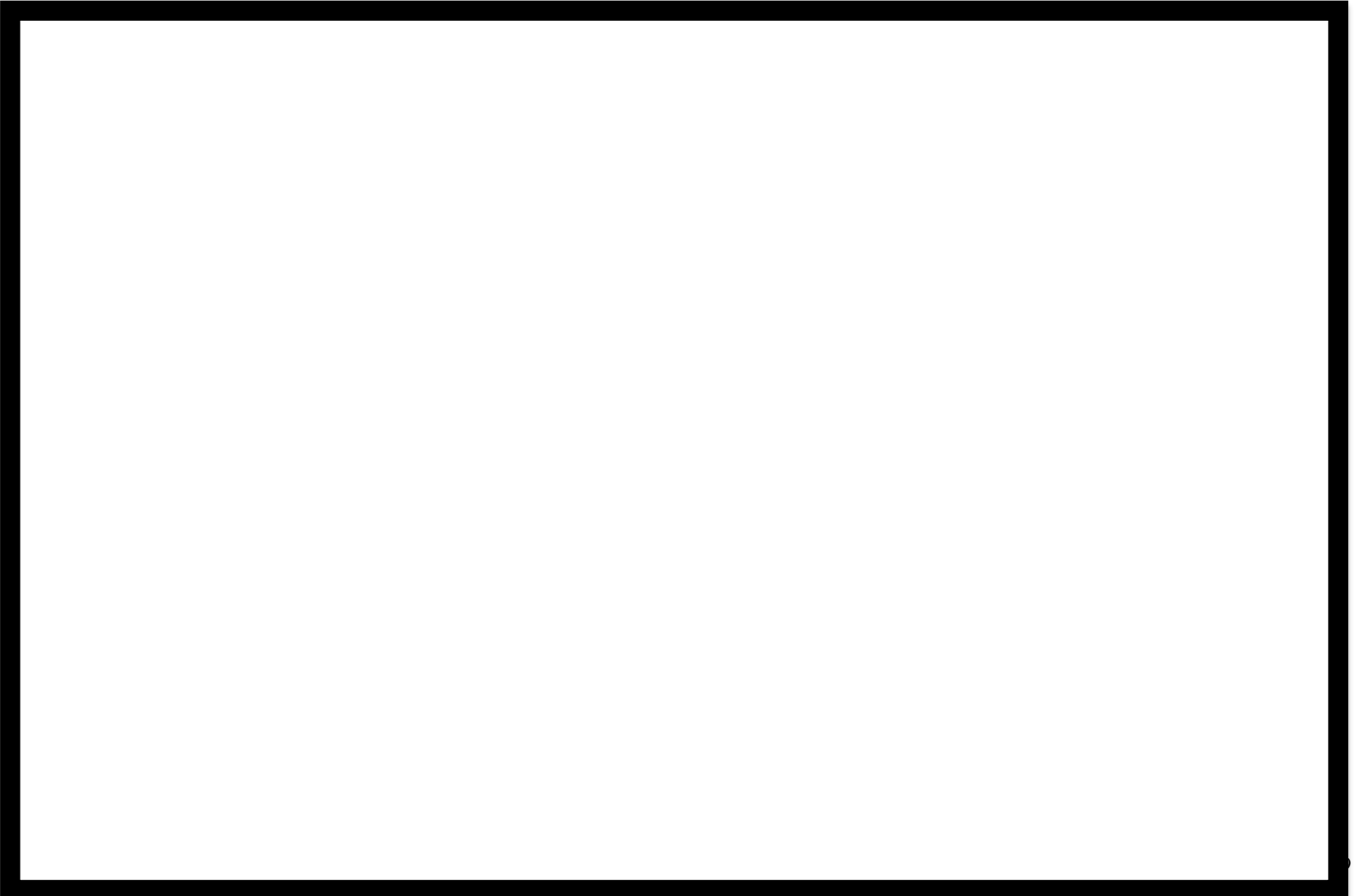
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Zachary Fishman <zack.fishman@newsguardtech.com>
To: Info ConsortiumNews <info@consortiumnews.com>

Wed, Apr 6, 2022 at 4:46 PM

Got it, thanks for the update.

[Quoted text hidden]



Info ConsortiumNews <info@consortiumnews.com>
To: Zachary Fishman <zack.fishman@newsguardtech.com>

Wed, Apr 13, 2022 at 10:35 AM

Hi Zach,
Just to tell you we are still working on our response. Thanks for your patience.
Best,
Joe

On Mon, Mar 28, 2022 at 6:14 PM Zachary Fishman <zack.fishman@newsguardtech.com> wrote:
[Quoted text hidden]

Zachary Fishman <zack.fishman@newsguardtech.com>
To: Info ConsortiumNews <info@consortiumnews.com>

Wed, Apr 13, 2022 at 10:43 AM

Great, thanks for the update, Joe.
[Quoted text hidden]

Zachary Fishman <zack.fishman@newsguardtech.com>
To: Info ConsortiumNews <info@consortiumnews.com>

Wed, Apr 20, 2022 at 11:13 AM

Hi Joe,

Is it reasonable for me to expect your response by the end of this week? We're looking to publish our review of Consortium News soon.

Thanks,
Zack
[Quoted text hidden]

Zachary Fishman <zack.fishman@newsguardtech.com>
To: Info ConsortiumNews <info@consortiumnews.com>

Wed, Apr 27, 2022 at 12:30 PM

As a final reminder, does Consortium News have a response to my questions? As I said before, NewsGuard will be moving forward with our review of the website very soon.
[Quoted text hidden]

Zachary Fishman <zack.fishman@newsguardtech.com>
To: Info ConsortiumNews <info@consortiumnews.com>

Tue, May 10, 2022 at 3:29 PM

Hi Joe,

As we finish up our review of Consortium News, a couple additional questions have come up that I'd like to pose to you:

1. To double-check, does Consortium News really not have an owner (such as the Consortium of Independent Journalism)? More specifically, who or what owns the domain ConsortiumNews.com?
2. What are the names of the two foundations that have funded Consortium News?
3. I have found additional corrected articles from the past year since I first asked you for additional examples, and they pretty clearly demonstrate to me a regular pattern of issuing corrections. However, many articles that have included claims I previously identified as false (especially pertaining to Ukraine and Syrian chemical attacks) have not been corrected, including the articles I pointed out in my first list of questions. Given that many recent false claims have gone uncorrected, do you believe Consortium News' correction practices are effective?

Best,
Zack

[Quoted text hidden]

Info ConsortiumNews <info@consortiumnews.com>
To: Zachary Fishman <zack.fishman@newsguardtech.com>

Tue, May 10, 2022 at 7:09 PM

Hi Zach,

I will take your new questions. The answers to your previous ones involve much work to answer. Unfortunately I am the only one who can answer your questions while running the website. So I will need another week. We have no owner because we are a non-profit. The domain name was set up in 1998 by our founder Robertt Parry, who died in 2018.

Best,
Joe

[Quoted text hidden]

Zachary Fishman <zack.fishman@newsguardtech.com>
To: Info ConsortiumNews <info@consortiumnews.com>

Wed, May 11, 2022 at 12:50 PM

Thanks for letting me know Joe, though given our publication timeline, I can wait only two days for your answers to these questions (and any others you'd like) before we move forward to publish the review. We'd still be happy to include any comments you provide after the review's publication.

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Zachary Fishman <zack.fishman@newsguardtech.com>
To: Info ConsortiumNews <info@consortiumnews.com>

Fri, May 13, 2022 at 12:23 PM

And just as a follow-up to your statement, "We have no owner because we are a non-profit," what specifically is the "we"? The CIJ, the nonprofit, or ConsortiumNews.com, the website, or something else? This may look like splitting hairs but it's a helpful distinction for me to understand what you're saying, especially since the idea that the website ConsortiumNews.com is not owned by any person or entity (if that's what you meant) still strikes me as an unusual one.

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Info ConsortiumNews <info@consortiumnews.com>
To: Zachary Fishman <zack.fishman@newsguardtech.com>

Fri, May 13, 2022 at 1:13 PM

CIJ is the publisher of Consortium News. All of our board members are listed on the front page of our website for all the world to see. These are the "we." There is no one else involved than those people and our writers. We are hiring an outside auditor to look at our books and prove we don't take a penny from any government, advertiser or corporations.

I intend to answer all your questions on Monday as I will work through the weekend to finish our response. I have a question for you: is it NewsGuard's policy to contact funders of websites to discuss your reviews with them?

In your previous email you asked whether we would correct the stories you have brought up. Again that seems like you've made your judgement already that we publish false content without waiting for our response, without due process. I am putting together a very detailed response that is taking enormous time, which is in addition to the enormous duties I have as editor of the site.

Best,
Joe

[Quoted text hidden]

Info ConsortiumNews <info@consortiumnews.com>
To: Zachary Fishman <zack.fishman@newsguardtech.com>

Fri, May 13, 2022 at 1:13 PM

The CIJ is the non-profit organization that publishes Consortium News. This information is easily available online.

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Zachary Fishman <zack.fishman@newsguardtech.com>
To: Info ConsortiumNews <info@consortiumnews.com>

Fri, May 13, 2022 at 3:28 PM

Hi Joe,

I appreciate your extended explanation about ownership, which is all I need on that subject; it admittedly took me a little longer to fully grasp than I expected, so thanks for your patience.

No, NewsGuard does not have a policy of reaching out to sites' funders to discuss reviews, and we won't be doing that for CN's.

And finally, I can wait until Monday for your response, and I look forward to seeing your comments on all the questions. As I said before, I will take your responses into account before making final determinations on the claims I identified as seemingly false; I had dropped the "seemingly" from that corrections question after assuming that you would not defend the claims or otherwise answer my first batch of questions, since I hadn't heard from you in four weeks (we've been "ghosted" in the past after promises of a response).

All the best,
Zack

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Info ConsortiumNews <info@consortiumnews.com>
To: Zachary Fishman <zack.fishman@newsguardtech.com>

Mon, May 16, 2022 at 11:23 AM

Thanks Zach. I'm in Slovenia at the moment where I spoke at a PEN International conference and am about to board a plane to London. It does not look good or me sending my full response to you today. I can try to send a partial response and then the full thing on Tuesday. Thanks for your patience.

Best,
Joe

[Quoted text hidden]

Zachary Fishman <zack.fishman@newsguardtech.com>
To: Info ConsortiumNews <info@consortiumnews.com>

Mon, May 16, 2022 at 11:28 PM

That's alright, I was backed up with other work today so tomorrow will work. I hope your visit in Slovenia is going well.

[Quoted text hidden]

Info ConsortiumNews <info@consortiumnews.com>
To: Zachary Fishman <zack.fishman@newsguardtech.com>

Tue, May 17, 2022 at 12:17 PM

Hi Zach,
I'm in London feverishly working to finish a very detailed response to your questions. I'm not stalling. I want very much to answer you. It looks like I may finish tonight or on Wednesday morning. Hold tight.

Best,
Joe

[Quoted text hidden]

Zachary Fishman <zack.fishman@newsguardtech.com>
To: Info ConsortiumNews <info@consortiumnews.com>

Tue, May 17, 2022 at 1:54 PM

Will do, thank you for the update.

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Info ConsortiumNews <info@consortiumnews.com>
To: Zachary Fishman <zack.fishman@newsguardtech.com>

Thu, May 19, 2022 at 9:50 AM

Zach,
I will send you part one of our response shortly and hopefully part two by tomorrow.

Best,
Joe

On Tue, May 17, 2022 at 1:55 PM Zachary Fishman

[Quoted text hidden]

Zachary Fishman <zack.fishman@newsguardtech.com>
To: Info ConsortiumNews <info@consortiumnews.com>

Thu, May 19, 2022 at 10:46 AM

Great, thanks.

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